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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 DOHA 000032

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/13/2019

TAGS: [EAIR](#) [ASEC](#) [QA](#)

SUBJECT: QATAR AVIATION SECURITY REMAINS A WORK IN PROGRESS

REF: A. 2008 DOHA 820

[1](#)B. 2008 DOHA 868

Classified By: Amb. Joseph LeBaron for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

(C) KEY POINTS

-- Qatar's aviation security authorities are moving to address TSA's continued concerns over passenger screening at Doha International Airport.

-- In separate meetings with the Ambassador, Qatar's senior-most aviation sector officials remained defensive about TSA's findings, and believe the Emergency Amendment's 100 percent physical and x-ray screening procedures go too far and are exacting too great a cost on commercial operations.

(C) COMMENT AND ACTION REQUESTS

-- The Civil Aviation Authority's more assertive oversight may help the police positively reconfigure checkpoints and maintain consistent standards. Still, the police are hamstrung by systemic staffing and expertise gaps.

-- Quick follow-up by TSA to offer both the carrot of engagement and the stick of further inspections is essential to ensure continued Qatari focus on meeting standards.

-- Qatar's Chief of Airport Security and several other senior MOI officers will be in Washington February 7-20 for an ATA course (6296: Anti-Terrorism Executive Forum). This presents an exceptional opportunity for TSA to engage these officers, and others from the CAA or airline who may be available to attend. Embassy requests that TSA send an invitation soonest to the relevant interlocutors to begin organizing this trip.

-- Embassy also requests that the official December 2008 inspection report be provided ASAP to Qatar.

End Key Points and Comments.

[1](#)1. (C) In separate meetings with the heads of the Ministry of Interior (MOI), Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), and Qatar Airways, Ambassador made clear that the December 2008 TSA inspection did not go well, and the USG is looking for

sustained improvements in passenger screening to ensure that direct flights to the U.S. continue. Ambassador underscored that Qatar must address these problems immediately, and the staffing and screening problems Qatar is experiencing will only grow worse as the country opens a new airport in a few years which will eventually quintuple passenger loads. Ambassador said he expected TSA to provide a formal report soon to the GOQ, and to request additional visits and inspections.

Police Defensive, Trying to Meet TSA Standards

12. (C) Minister of State for Internal Affairs (de facto Interior Minister) Sheikh Abdulla bin Nasser Al Thani told Ambassador January 13 that he understood TSA's concerns and has directed the police to address all problem areas. He also asserted that the government's plans for security at the new airport are coming along, and the new airport committee is working through its plan to ensure security is appropriately staffed. He suggested that MOI would retain security responsibility at the airport (a point of disagreement with the air carrier - see below).

13. (C) Brigadier Nasser al-Malki, the MOI's Chief of Airport Security, acknowledged there are problems but noted that despite their criticism of Qatar's screening procedures, TSA and the USG had never -- to Qatar's knowledge -- caught one passenger entering the U.S. with a prohibited item. By contrast, Qatar had caught more than five passengers in the

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last year who originated in the U.S. and tried to enter Qatar with weapons. The most recent example was a passenger with firearms who came from LAX. Al-Malki continued that Qatar had been working with ICAO for more than 9 years and while the organization had identified some problem areas, it was "nothing major" and the problems have already been solved.

14. (C) Al-Malki acknowledged that the airport layout is not good and the flow of passengers a problem, but said they were working to address it and revising the layout at the new airport to prevent any such problems. He continued that Qatar has "three levels of screening" (presumably referring to originating/transfer screening, and the gate screening) at the current airport, and is working on improving female searches, but there are no major issues which should justify cutting off flights. He closed by reiterating that the MOI is keen to work with TSA to address any problem areas.

15. (C) Al-Malki said he would welcome the chance to consult with TSA during his February trip to Washington and said he will be waiting for TSA's proposal/invitation.

Civil Aviation Authority Expanding Oversight Role

16. (C) CAA Chairman Abdulaziz Al-Noaimi told the Ambassador January 7 that the CAA is focused on meeting or exceeding ICAO standards in all areas, and he has directed his staff (principally Security Advisor Ian Gilchrist) to formulate a new plan to improve airport procedures. Al-Noaimi noted that the CAA was in disagreement with some of TSA's findings, and thought that the inspectors were "a bit harsh." Still, Gilchrist said the CAA is in agreement with TSA on two central issues: that general passenger screening (transfer and originating) needs to be improved, and U.S. flight standards need to be maintained consistently. At the Chairman's direction, the CAA is working to reconfigure existing checkpoints and equipment to address passenger flow concerns; has created new SOPs in Arabic for the police; and will be expanding its training regimen and requirements with its training vendor, the College of the North Atlantic.

¶7. (C) Al-Noaimi and Gilchrist both emphasized that they want to see the Emergency Amendment (EA) removed, and they know the path is to make sure the central screening stations are up to standard. Gilchrist lamented, as he has in the past, that Qatari authorities have a problem with the form and substance of the additional screening requirements. He claimed such requirements, particularly 100 percent physical and x-ray search of all hand-carry baggage, are rarely if ever imposed at other locations, and they are creating flight delays and a major drain on resources. Further, he asserted that it is still Qatari authorities' impression that TSA did not write the EA well, did not understand the text itself, and only seized on the 100 percent screening issue as a penalty for Qatar when the agency was displeased with security during the October inspection.

¶8. (C) The Ambassador noted TSA would be organizing a side trip for MOI officers in conjunction with their February trip to the U.S., and invited the CAA to send representatives if possible. The Chairman responded that it was a good idea, and directed Gilchrist to coordinate CAA participation in the trip.

Qatar Airways Frustrated by Commercial Impact

¶9. (C) Later on January 7, in a separate meeting, Qatar Airways CEO Akbar Al-Baker told Ambassador most U.S. flights were being delayed because of the security procedures required under the Emergency Amendment. He noted his biggest problem is that the airline can do a better job on security but the government has a different opinion and won't let them take charge of passenger screening (i.e., contract out the job). He noted that the New Doha International Airport (NDIA), slated to open in mid-2011, would be a "different story," as they would employ contractors and new technologies which will reduce the human screening burden. As he has

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before, he claimed that if security requirements continued to impact his business, he may have to cancel flights to the U.S. Ambassador replied that he realized that was an option and it may come to that if the police can't get security right. Al-Baker quickly backtracked, cautioning that "of course canceling is not what I want."

¶10. (C) Separately, Al-Baker noted the fixed checkpoint for U.S. flights inside the premium terminal would be commissioned "within days" and they had built the special checkpoint at a cost of 2.5 million Qatari riyals (about USD 687,000).

LeBaron